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UNCLAS BOGOTA 003691

SIPDIS

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TAGS: SNAR PTER MOPS CO

SUBJECT: COUNTER DRUG BRIGADE SUCCESSES IN NARINO

¶1. (U) Summary: Counter Drug (CD) Brigade operations in Narino Department from January to March destroyed 13 HCL labs, captured over 1500 kgs of cocaine HCL and over 5000 kgs of explosives. The 1st and 2nd battalions of the Plan Colombia-supported CD Brigade have been conducting ongoing operations to secure areas in southern Narino to enable spray aircraft to conduct aerial eradication. Thus far in 2005 the aerial eradication program has sprayed over 45,000 hectares of coca in Narino Department alone. End Summary.

¶2. (U) During the first quarter of 2005, elements of the CD Brigade conducted a series of successful operations in the general vicinity of the Mira, Guisa, Nulpe, and Mataje rivers (major drug transit routes):

- In a January operation the CD Brigade destroyed two cocaine HCL processing labs, over one million coca plant seedlings (enough to plant over 80 hectares of coca), more than 40 tons of liquid precursors and 10 tons of solid precursors, and three narcoterrorist camps.

- During a February 17-27 operation the CD Brigade destroyed one cocaine HCL lab and a narcoterrorist camp belonging to the Armed Revolutionary Front of Colombia (FARC).

- During a March 7-29 operation in southern Narino Department the CD Brigade captured more than 1500 kgs of cocaine HCL and nearly 500 kgs of cocaine base. The unit destroyed eight cocaine hcl labs belonging to the 'Daniel Aldana' Mobile Column of the FARC and to elements of the 'Cabrera Ruales' Company of the National Liberation Army (ELN) narco-terrorist groups. The CD Brigade destroyed over 40,000 gallons of liquid precursor chemicals and over 67 tons of solid precursors. The unit also destroyed nearly three tons of explosives of the type used to construct car and house bombs; five tons of food stuffs; seed beds with over 700,000 coca plants; and nine narco-terrorist camps.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: CD Brigade operations and tactics in support of spray operations have evolved under the new commander, Brigadier General Luis Felipe Paredes Cadena. Night and daytime assaults are conducted against specific targets in the spray areas. The objective is to stay on the ground only the time necessary to engage the enemy, destroy camps and drug processing labs, and neutralize identified threats to spray aircraft. These operations are typically 3-5 days in duration, compared to the 2-3 week sweeps previously employed. The extended deployments often resulted in higher casualties from enemy hit and run attacks and anti-personnel mines laid in advance of CD Brigade troop movements. During the Narino campaign there have been fewer casualties, fewer impacts against spray aircraft, and a higher success rate in operations against narco-terrorist groups. End Comment.

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